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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the effectiveness of an interactive, co-educational date rape prevention program. Participants for the study (n=192, 97% Caucasian) consisted of sorority and fraternity members of a larger midwestern university. Eighty-four individuals were assigned to a control group with the rest making up the intervention group. All subjects answered questions on sexual attitudes, sexual stereotypes, and other issues one week prior to the intervention program, immediately after the program, and again, one month later. The intervention group watched an interactive, improvisational theater performance in which actors portrayed a date rape. Audience members were then encouraged by a male/female team of counselors to offer feedback as to how the rape could have been avoided. The actors then replayed the scene, incorporating audience suggestions, and the rape did not occur. When both groups' pretest and immediate post-test scores were compared, those who watched the program, i.e., the intervention group, were less likely to endorse the kinds of rape myths and stereotypic beliefs thought to be associated with date rape. However, between-group differences were no longer evident in the one month follow up, suggesting that the program did not create lasting change. (RJM)

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An Evaluation of a Rape Prevention Program

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Abstract

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The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of a co-educational rape prevention program among members of sororities and fraternities. The intervention group ($n = 108$) participated in an interactive theater program and completed measures of attitudes toward sexual behavior, sex role stereotypes, and dating behaviors one week prior to, and immediately and one month following, the program. The control group ($n = 84$) completed the same measures at corresponding time periods. Significant between-group differences were evident at the post-test but not the follow-up in the desired direction (i.e., positive change in the intervention group). Implications for programming and future research are discussed.

Introduction

Sexual assault is increasingly being recognized as a large-scale problem on college campuses. A national survey indicated recently that 25% of female college students have been the victims of rape or attempted rape (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987). Once characterized as an attack by a stranger, current studies reveal that victims typically are acquainted with their assailants, and that rape often occurs in the context of a date (Parrot & Bechhofer, 1991). Like victims of stranger rape, victims of acquaintance rape exhibit significant anxiety, depression, and sexual problems (Gidycz & Koss, 1991). Factors that are associated with higher risk of being both a victim and perpetrator of acquaintance rape include greater acceptance of rape myths, more traditional sex role attitudes, and greater alcohol use (Parrot & Bechhofer, 1991).

The earliest response to this problem by colleges and universities was to provide counseling and advocacy services for victims. As awareness of the scope of the problem has grown, so has recognition of the need to provide preventive, as well as remedial, services. Typically, these prevention programs consist of lecture presentations on such topics as rape myths, risk factors, and rape prevention techniques. Although a great deal of resources have been put into such programs, research assessing their effectiveness is scarce. Our review of the literature revealed five studies that have assessed the effectiveness of rape prevention programs (Borden et al., 1988; Gilbert et al., 1991; Gray et al., 1990; Jones & Muehlenhard, 1990; Lee, 1987). All but one study (Borden et al., 1988) found that such programs can significantly alter beliefs and attitudes about rape. These studies have, however, been limited in several respects, as outlined below.

First, in terms of format, most studies have evaluated a lecture-style program which may not be maximally engaging for participants. Second, only two studies have included both male and female participants. Both of these programs were lectures that did not provide an opportunity for men and women to learn from each other. Third, all of the studies to date have recruited participants from social science classes. Thus, assessments of programs conducted in the field are absent from the literature. Finally, only two studies have assessed program effectiveness beyond an immediate post-test.

The present study was undertaken as a collaborative effort with our university's sexual violence program to increase our knowledge of the effectiveness of date rape prevention programs as well as to reduce the incidence of date rape at our institution. This study improved on prior research in several ways. First, the program involved an interactive, improvisational theater performance in which actors portrayed a date rape, the participants provided feedback on how the rape could have been avoided, and the scene was re-enacted so that the rape did not occur. The program was designed to be more engaging for participants and to provide modeling of new behaviors and attitudes. In addition, the pairing of positive and negative modeling has been found to maximize the generalization of new behaviors (Baldwin, 1992). Second, the program was designed for both males and females and thus facilitates learning from the opposite sex. Third, by using members of sororities and fraternities as participants this study contributes to our knowledge of program effectiveness with high-risk groups in the field. Finally, we assessed the effects of the intervention both immediately and one month following the intervention.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants were 117 sorority and 75 fraternity members at a large midwestern university. Ages ranged from 19 to 27 years and the majority of the sample was Caucasian (97%). One sorority ($n = 63$) and one fraternity ($n = 45$) were assigned to the intervention group and one sorority ($n = 54$) and one fraternity ($n = 30$) were assigned to the control group based on time availability. Pretest questionnaires were administered one week prior to the program; the post-test was administered immediately following the program; and the follow-up questionnaire was administered one month after the program. The control group participated in the program after the follow-up assessment.

Measures

All participants completed (a) a measure of attitudes toward male and female behavior in a sexual encounter adapted from Bechhofer (1990) that assessed attitudes regarding the acceptability of a woman saying "no" to sex despite various factors (e.g., her male partner's arousal) and the acceptability of a male interpreting a female's "no" as the first step in a negotiation process; (b) adaptations of Burt's (1980) measures of sex role stereotyping, adversarial sexual beliefs, and sexual conservatism; and (c) a measure assessing attitudes and beliefs specifically targeted in the intervention, such as the importance of equality and respect, assertive communication, and safety precautions for men and women. Those in the intervention group also answered questions regarding their evaluation of the program (e.g., how much they learned, what they liked and disliked).

Intervention

The program involved interactive improvisational theater and was modeled after a program developed at Cornell University (Parrot, 1988). Participants watched two scenes presented by actors from the Theater Department. In the first scene, which took place at a fraternity party, a male and female actor portrayed a first date that ended in rape. The audience then discussed the dynamics of the situation with the actors (who remained in character) and suggested ways in which they could have responded differently to the situation. The actors then replayed the first scene incorporating the suggestions made by the audience with the end result being that both parties acted more responsibly, and no rape occurred. The program was facilitated by a male/female team of counselors from the sexual violence program on campus who introduced the scenarios, facilitated audience interaction with the actors, and provided basic information on sex roles, communication, and date rape, as well as campus resources. These counselors also were available to talk with participants after the program.

Results

We had planned to perform three MANOVAS (separately for each of the dependent measures) to assess changes in attitudes across the three assessment periods in the two groups. Due to sample attrition, we had insufficient power to conduct these analyses. (Analyses indicated that those who dropped out did not differ from those who stayed in terms of pretest scores, $F(3, 169) = .41$, ns.) We therefore performed three MANOVAS comparing intervention and control group scores on the three dependent measures separately for each of the time periods (see Table 1). First, as expected, there were no significant differences between the intervention and control groups on pretest scores. As predicted, the intervention and control groups did differ on their post-test scores; $F(3, 99) = 8.02$, $p < .0001$. The univariate F's revealed significant between-group differences on all three measures. These differences were, however, no longer significant at the follow-up assessment one month after the program, $F(3, 80) = .29$, ns.

Because these analyses do not reflect changes over time, we also performed six hierarchical regression analyses in which post-test or follow-up scores were regressed on pretest scores (step 1), the group variable (intervention vs. control) (step 2), and the group by pretest interaction (step 3) following procedures outlined by Cohen and Cohen (1983). Once pretest scores were controlled, the group variable only added to the prediction of post-test scores on the measure assessing the specific dating behaviors targeted in the program. In other words, group membership was only significant in predicting change in pre-test to post-test scores on one measure and group membership did not predict change in pretest to follow-up scores on any of the measures.

Overall, the subjective evaluations of the intervention group to the program were very positive. All participants reported that they learned something and both males and females thought that information on open and assertive communication was one of the most important parts of the program. At the follow-up, the intervention group reported that they liked the program and that they would recommend it to other fraternities and sororities.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to assess the effectiveness of an interactive, co-educational date rape prevention program. The participants were members of fraternities and sororities, who have been found to be at higher risk of being both victims and perpetrators of date rape. Results suggested that men and women who participated in the program were less likely to endorse the kinds of rape myths and stereotypic beliefs that have been found to be associated with date rape. These changes were most evident on a measure that assessed dating behaviors that were specifically addressed in the program (e.g., respect and equality between men and women, assertive communication, safety precautions). Nonetheless, between-group differences were no longer evident one month following the program. These conclusions also were supported by regression analyses that examined changes from the pre-test to the post-test and follow-up. Thus, although the program was very popular with the participants, it did not appear to create lasting change.

These conclusion must be tempered by a consideration of the limitations of this study which include lack of variability in the measures (i.e., floor effects) and low power due to sample attrition. Further research is needed that compares different types of rape prevention programs and that uses more sensitive attitude measures. These data - as well as common sense - also suggest a need for more extensive programs if lasting change is to occur.

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Table 1

Between-group Differences on Dependent Measures in Intervention and Control Groups at Three Assessment Periods

	Intervention	Control	F
<u>Pretest</u>			1.22
	(<u>n</u> = 104)	(<u>n</u> = 76)	
Sexual attitudes	1.23 (.34)	1.34 (.47)	
Sex role stereotypes	2.05 (.61)	2.15 (.60)	
Dating behaviors	1.89 (.52)	1.95 (.50)	
<u>Post-test</u>			8.02****
	(<u>n</u> = 51)	(<u>n</u> = 56)	
Sexual attitudes	1.20 (.34)	1.41 (.57)	5.13*
Sex role stereotypes	1.91 (.54)	2.18 (.60)	5.70*
Dating behaviors	1.55 (.35)	1.90 (.38)	24.54****
<u>Follow-up</u>			.29
	(<u>n</u> = 50)	(<u>n</u> = 39)	
Sexual attitudes	1.29 (.37)	1.23 (.35)	
Sex role stereotypes	2.13 (.59)	2.07 (.57)	
Dating behaviors	1.73 (.47)	1.80 (.35)	

Note. Scale = 1 to 5 with higher scores indicating more "negative" beliefs.